

"Remember Pearl Harbor" Not An Empty Phrase to Local Boy

Seven minutes of torpedo attack and 33 hours trapped in his ship under the waters of Pearl Harbor was how Yeoman Bert Crenshaw, USN, experienced the treacherous December 7th attack on Pearl Harbor.

Bert, visiting his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Crenshaw, in Arkansas Pass for the first time since completing his training period in 1933, described the assault on the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized in Pearl Harbor before the attack had more than begun in the early morning hours of that fateful Sunday.

The Oklahoma, with eight other ships anchored in the harbor at Ford Island, was the first to be hit. The battleship for what reason Crenshaw does not know, on this occasion had taken as its berth the front, outside position at the line of four ships, anchored two deep. Usually a berth in the middle of the line was allotted the Oklahoma but on December 7 it was at the front. The seven torpedoes it received turned it over in seven minutes.

First Torpedo

Crenshaw was just getting up when the first torpedo struck. Some of the men were still in bed, having foregone breakfast in favor of a few more winks. The

alarm was sounded and six more torpedoes followed in quick succession upon the first.

Crenshaw, whose duties are in the office during ordinary times, rushed immediately to his battle station, below decks where he was to handle the phones at a firing station. The door to the room where his station was had been closed, so he remained in the one next to it, the carpenter shop, where he assisted the repairmen who already were preparing to go into action.

This, it should be remembered, was in the space of 7 minutes. The ship was listing considerable, "but I kept thinking that it was just listing and wasn't going to turn over," he said. "Then the lights went off and the ship turned over; the benches broke loose and started sliding over the floor. Tools flew in all directions and the water poured into the room. It was just like standing on a deck and having it go out from under you."

That interval, when the ship capsized, lights went out and water poured in was the only time during the entire experience that he felt any fear, he said. After that, there was too much to do to be afraid.

Six Swim Out

After the water stopped pour-

ing into the room, Bert and five others swimming with him found a "trunk," a small passageway between compartments. There was little water here and soon the men discovered a door into the next compartment.

The door, upside down as were all things, came loose when it was opened as the pin holding it fell out. In order to put the door on again, the men spent some time feeling on the floor for the bolts. The room, a powder compartment, was dry and made a satisfactory refuge. Using a bar they found, they beat upon the sides of the room, for they were sure that rescuers would be trying to free them from their underwater prison.

Having escaped from the flooded room, the sextet soon found another problem as serious: the oxygen in the compartment was being breathed up. As the fresh air diminished they found another door and moved into the next compartment, remembering first to retrieve the bolts.

Thus their time was spent, pounding on the sides of the room, arousing comrades who, drowsy from lack of oxygen, lay down and were in danger of going to sleep and not awaking. During the quiet of the evening,

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Oklahoma Pass

July 1942

Remember Pearl Harbor.

"Pearl Harbor Not Empty Phrase"

—Buy Bonds—

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the trapped men could even hear the sound of the bombing and of the anti-aircraft guns on the mainland.

Rescuers Arrive

At last pouding other than that they were doing was heard.

"You felt as if you were way back in a cave and could hear the sound from outside," Crenshaw explained. It was faint, then louder, then would become fainter as the rescuers moved off. "We really beat with that bar then!" he exclaimed. "Finally the sound got real loud and we knew that they had found us."

Their troubles were not yet over, however. The rescuers, in order to get to the men, were forced to cut through the steel top (actually the floor) of the compartment. To begin cutting, they bored a hole through and up through this opening poured the precious oxygen of the room. As the oxygen and the pressure of it left the compartment, water from below began coming into the room and the men were forced to remove their clothing and stop up the holes.

Most of the water was kept out and finally a hole big enough for a man to crawl through was made above. Out they climbed into one of the engine rooms. The floor was deep in oil, as were others they went through.

Monday Afternoon

"We asked them what time it was and they said four o'clock. We of course thought it was four o'clock Sunday but it wasn't—it was Monday afternoon. We had been under there 33 hours," Bert explained.

Human life lines had been formed by the rescuers to pass rescued men across the oily floors from one room to another. Crenshaw and those with him passed through seven of the holes cut through steel, some in ceilings and some in walls. Going thru the last, they left the Oklahoma and were taken on a hospital ship standing by.

After a week on the hospital "getting fat," Crenshaw went on shore duty at Honolulu, where he remained until returning to the States recently.

"Yes, I got pretty hungry down there, but I tried not to think about it. I was thirstier than I was hungry, though."

Thus ended a period of about 34 years of duty aboard the USS Oklahoma in the Pacific for the local youth, who had served on no other vessel since enlisting.

He will report July 9 for two months' duty in San Francisco, after which he will be assigned to another ship.

—Nip The Nipponese—

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